

## THE PLACE OF AGE AND SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS IN CONTEMPORARY FASHION

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigated contemporary fashion amongst Nigerian undergraduate students, with a focus of finding out the rationale for such behaviour and with such an understanding, proffering suggestions as to how help individuals with adjustment problems. An attempt was made to characterise the relationship between the independent variables (age and socioeconomic status) and the four dimensions of clothing habits. Two hypotheses were proposed to explain the possible relationships between these independent variables and the dimensions of clothing habits. The data of the study, while providing ample evidence in support of some of these hypotheses, also appeared to contradict others. Thus, the results were mixed. It was concluded that age and socioeconomic status are possible factors that determine individuals' clothing preferences. With knowledge of contemporary fashion behaviour of young persons, the counsellor is better placed to help individuals better adjust in the changing world.

**KEYWORDS:** Age, Socioeconomic Status, Clothing Habits, Fashion

### INTRODUCTION

Most social scientists take it for granted that an individual's clothing expresses meaning (Odeleye 2000, Stubbs 1969, Ryan 1991). They accept the old parlance that "a picture is worth a thousand words" and generally concede that dress and ornament are elements in a communication system. They recognise that a person's attire can indicate either conformity or resistance to socially defined expectations for behaviour. Yet, few scholars have attempted to explain the meaning and relevance of clothing habits systematically. They often mistake it for fashion (a period's desired appearance), whereas clothing refers to established patterns of dress (Rubinstein 1995).

Browsing through any fashion magazine or taking notice of the hundreds of clothing, jewellery and cosmetic advertisements filling other periodicals, a reader may presume that an individual seeks to express his identity through the clothes he puts on because different clothing styles seem represent different interests and capabilities in sports, business, sex and other facets of one's personality. The use of clothing to express a person's identity also has historical references in biblical culture. Adam and Eve put on clothing to mark their loss of innocence (KJV Bible 1996). Using the same logic, missionaries throughout the world attempted to clothe the semi-nude savages as a sign of their transformation to "civilised" Christians-What a paradox?

One general observation is the tendency for different peoples to invent clothes that would suit their peculiar terrain. This may then explain why the Yorubas dress the way they do. Also, that explains the invention of the famous work-dress, denim jeans by Levi Strauss in the USA in the 1850s primarily for persons doing hardwork and rough jobs (Jackman1990). Sewell (1986) submitted that in hot countries such as India and Egypt where loose clothes and light fabrics were worn by everyone, people dress largely for the weather rather than for fashion, class or employment.

In the history of fashion and costumes, there is always a reason why every clothe is worn. In man's early history, he wore clothes simply to keep warm, and what those looked like was determined by the materials available-animal skins and furs. For example, Ice Age cave dwellers wore animal skins for extra warmth as some Inuit (Eskimo) hunters and Laplander reindeer herders still do - while many native African people wore and still wear very little. Then, if a man wore a lion's skin, you could be

sure he was a brave hunter. Tribal chiefs liked to wear something (a crown, a hat, or a cloak of a special colour, perhaps) which no one else was allowed to have.

#### The Problem

This study examined Nigerian undergraduate students' clothing behaviour in relation to age and socioeconomic status. It is observed that many undergraduate male students tend to prefer the shirt and trousers combination while the skirt and blouse option or gown is the vogue with the female students. While it is suggested that youths' fashion in the Western world (especially in the United States of America) like punk and teddy boys may tend to depict a culture of protest and rebellion against the status quo, it is not very clear whether the Nigerian youth is rebelling against the established system or perhaps he is only manifesting a culture of hypocrisy which pervades the entire society. Also, it may be that the individual's clothing habits is an extension of his psychosocial make-up.

In trying to proffer solutions to the specific problems raised, and guided by the framework discussed above, the following hypotheses were proposed to be tested:

1. There is no significant difference between each of the independent variables (age and socioeconomic status) and each of the dimensions of clothing habits (social approval, anxiety, exhibitionism and originality).
2. There is no significant difference between the independent variables (age and socioeconomic status) and each of the four dimensions of clothing habits (social approval, anxiety, exhibitionism and originality).

#### DESIGN

The independent variables are age and socioeconomic status. While Age has four levels: 15-18year olds, 19-22year olds, 23-26year olds and 27year olds+, Socioeconomic status has three levels: rich, average/middle class and poor. Thus, the statistical design is a 4 (age) x 3 (socioeconomic status) factorial design.

The dependent variable is clothing habits (measured by the following four dimensions of exhibitionism, originality, social approval and anxiety). Each of the dependent variables has two levels: (1) social/peer approval- no social/peer approval; (2) anxious- not anxious; (3) exhibitionist-conservative; and (4) original- conventional/orthodox. Thus, the statistical analysis design for the study was factorial design. This design also facilitated the determination of the extent to which each factor (and their different levels) individually predict or relate to each of the dimensions of clothing.

An underlying assumption in the study was that the data was continuous, not dichotomous, hence the data was analysed using Analysis of Variance. The ANOVA, a test of difference, was used primarily to determine the interactional effects of the variables, while Multiple Regression Analysis and Stepwise Regression were also used for prediction and causality.

A simple correlational analysis for each of the variables (both independent and dependent) (see Table 3) was carried out to confirm the spread of the respondents and the interrelationality of the variables using Pearson Correlation Coefficients. Each of the independent variables was then linearly regressed against each of the dependent variables of clothing habits using Analysis of Variance. This was to confirm whether there was any linear relationship between the respective independent variables and the dependent variables.

After the linear regression, a multiple regression analysis was done matching each of the dependent variables against all the independent variables. This was done so that we may be able to predict the effect of particular independent variables on the respective dependent variables.

Then, there was need to conduct a stepwise regression analysis on the variables to ascertain the extent of influence of particular independent variables on the clothing habits measures. Against each of the dependent variables, the independent variables were introduced one after the other, once the variables met the 0.05 level of significance for entry into the model.

**Study Population and Sampling Procedure**

The study population consisted of Nigerian undergraduate students, while the sample was drawn from four universities namely, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Ogun State University, Ago Iwoye, University of Maiduguri, Maiduguri and University of Ibadan, Ibadan. Since there was insufficient data on university enrolment in Nigeria and as result of inadequate funding, a sample of undergraduates was drawn by quota sampling method. This sample comprised of one thousand (1000) students. A total of 250 subjects were selected from each university. This was done by a random distribution of 250 questionnaires in the Faculties of Administration, Education and Science (for OAU & OGUN) and the Faculties of Law, Social Science and Engineering (for Maiduguri & U.I.). These departments were considered to be representative of the whole university community of undergraduates. The questionnaires were simple paper and pencil type. Thus, the total subjects that participated in this study was 1,000.

A self-constructed instrument, Clothing Preferences Test(CPT) was used to elicit information from the respondents

*Table 1 showing demographic statistics and university/departmental distribution of the sample*  
**DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLE**

	OAU	IBADAN	AGO-IWOYE	MAIDUGURI
	n: 245	n: 238	n: 241	n: 233
GENDER 1	140	110	120	128
2	105	128	121	105
SES 1	31	26	35	33
2	165	148	149	184
3	49	64	57	16

\*n: number

*Table 2 showing Intercorrelations of dependent and independent variables*

Pearson Correlation Coefficients / Prob > |R| under Ho: Rho=0 / N = 957

**INTERCORRELATIONS OF DEPENDENT AND INDEPENDENT VARIABLES**

Age	-0.22	1.00	0.15	-0.01	-0.09	-0.14	0.17	0.01	0.02	-0.03	0.15
S/Status	-0.02	0.15	1.00	0.12	-0.12	-0.09	0.13	-0.17	0.18	-0.19	0.03
S/Approval	0.11	0.01	-0.17	-0.15	0.08	-0.10	0.20	1.00	-0.04	0.13	-0.08
Anxiety	-0.04	0.02	0.18	0.13	-0.26	-0.09	-0.08	-0.04	1.00	0.05	0.12
Exhibitionism	0.03	-0.00	-0.19	-0.04	0.01	0.14	0.06	0.13	0.05	1.00	-0.02
Originality	-0.02	0.15	0.03	0.02	-0.00	0.05	-0.09	-0.08	0.12	-0.02	1.00

Table 3: Showing Summary of Analyses of Variance of Social Approval, Anxiety, Exhibitionism & Originality

	DF	SOCIAL APPROVAL		ANXIETY		EXHIBIT		ORIGINAL	
		F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P
AGE (A)	1	.1	.04	.01	.99	1.1	.29	5.5*	.0001
SOCIOECO(SE)) (S)	1	5.9*	.0001	-5.2*	.0001	6.0*	.0001	.6	.58
All variables	2	18.6*	.0001	19.9*	.0001	6.3*	.0001	3.4*	.0092

\* significantly different

Table 4: Showing Summary of Duncan's Multiple Range Test (ANOVA) for all independent and dependent variables

	SOCIAL APPROVAL		ANXIETY		EXHIBITIONS		ORIGINAL	
AGE								
15-18 yrs	C	1.28	B	1.63	B	1.33	C	1.63
19-22 yrs	A	1.66	C	1.33	A	1.44	B	1.77
23-26 yrs	B	1.53	C	1.38	A	1.46	B	1.77
27yrs & above	C	1.29	A	1.71	B	1.28	A	1.86
**SOCIOECO								
Rich	A	1.66	C	1.33	A	1.62	A	1.78
Average	B	1.48	B	1.45	B	1.39	A	1.74
Poor	C	1.36	A	1.64	C	1.27	A	1.739

\*Means with the same letter are not significantly different

\*\*SOCIOECO means Socioeconomic Status

What was done here was to conduct both multiple regression analysis and stepwise regression analyses to ascertain the extent of effect of the independent variables on each of the dependent variables.

Generally, it was discovered that there is significant difference between the independent variables and clothing habits. In other words, to a reasonable extent, some of the independent variables may be dependable predictors of the type of clothing habits an individual may have.

## RESULTS

### Social Approval

Socioeconomic status showed significant difference with the clothing habits' dimension of Social Approval (Table 5).

Gender may influence the tendency towards desiring social/peer approval of the clothes the individual wears.

Table 5 showing ANOVA results for Social Approval

Model: MODEL1

Dependent Variable: SOCIAL APPROVAL

Analysis of Variance

		Sum of		Mean		
Source	DF	Squares	Square	F Value	Prob>	
Model	7	28.88097	4.12585	18.644	0.0001	
Error	949	210.01140	0.22130			
C Total	956	238.89237				
Parameter T for H0:						
Variable	DF	Estimate	Error	Parameter=0	Prob >  T	
INTERCEP	1	1.527167	0.12678793	12.045	0.0001	
AGE	1	0.000950	0.01625114	0.058	0.9534	
SOCIOE	1	-0.162983	0.02764289	-5.896	0.0001	

Also, it was discovered that socioeconomic status may influence the individual's inclination towards desiring other people's approval of what he wears. This study indicated that the richer the individual is, the more the inclination to desiring social and peer approval of what he wears. Previous studies submitted that individuals from high socioeconomic background are likely to be more psychologically mature and would be more independent and individualistic in their clothing habits (Rubinstein 1995). Results emanating from this study confirm this conclusion. Indigent students were less concerned about what others think about what they wear.

#### Anxiety

Two independent variables (age and socioeconomic status) demonstrated significant differences with anxiety. Only gender had no significant difference with anxiety (Table 7). Results indicated that the older students (27 yrs and above) were more anxious about what they wear than the other three groups. In other words, they were inclined to spend more time dressing up than other students. The youngest students (in this study), that is, the 15-18 year olds, rated next to the 'oldest' group in anxiety, while the other two groups (19-22 yr olds and 23-26 yr olds).

It was discovered that the poorer students were inclined to be more anxious about the clothes they wear than the richer students. Perhaps this may be as a result of peer pressure which I to be expected in tertiary institutions where there are many young persons in attendance.

Table 6 showing Analysis of Variance Procedure

Analysis of Variance Procedure

Dependent Variable: ANXIETY

		Sum of		Mean		
Source	DF	Squares	Square	F Value	Pr > F	
Model	11	57.9104000	5.2645818	27.56	0.0001	
Error	945	180.4908539	0.1909956			
Corrected Total	956	238.4012539				

Source	DF	Anova SS	Mean Square	F Value	Pr > F	
AGE	3	22.6978096	7.5659365	39.61	0.0001	
SOCIOE	2	8.1694210	4.0847105	21.39	0.0001	

#### Exhibitionism

Age and socioeconomic status showed significant difference with exhibitionism (See Table 6). Age showed significant difference with exhibitionism in clothing habits. The four age groups fell into two categories: those who like to show off what they wear (19-22 yrs and 23-26 yrs) and those who are conservative and orthodox in their dressing (15-18 yrs and 27 yrs). The implication of this is that more

undergraduate students are more inclined to show off what they wear. However, it was discovered that the older students were even more inclined to simple, conservative clothing than the youngest students (15-18 yr olds). The 23-26 yr olds were more inclined to exhibitionist dressing than the 19-22 yr olds.

It was discovered that richer students were inclined to be more exhibitionistic in their dressing. This may be due to the fact that the university campus is their operational base and every one of them seeks expression in one form or the other. The poorer the student is, the less she wants to show off, perhaps because she really does not have much to exhibit.

Table 7 showing ANOVA for Exhibitionism  
Dependent Variable: EXHIBITIONISM

			Sum of	Mean	
Source	DF	Squares	Square	F Value	Pr > F
Model	11	24.5963508	2.2360319	10.34	0.0001
Error		945	204.3085604	0.2161995	
Corrected Total		956	228.9049112		
		R-Square	C.V.	Root MSE	EXHIBIT Mean
		0.107452	33.30680	0.46497	1.39603
Source	DF	Anova SS	Mean Square	F Value	Pr > F
AGE	3	4.46391974	1.48797325	6.88	0.0001
SOCIOE	2	9.31000815	4.65500408	21.53	0.0001

#### Originality

Age showed significant difference with originality. It was discovered that the older an individual is, the more original/individualistic and independent (in clothing habits) she is likely to be (Table 8). Married undergraduates (who in most cases were 27year olds and above) were more inclined to be independent and original in their dressing.

Generally, there were fewer female respondents who indicated originality (as opposed to conventionality) in their clothing habits. However, out of 145 respondents that made up the 4th age group (27years and above), 70 were inclined to be original in their dressing. This may then be postulated that the older the individual is, the more independent and original he is likely to become. Of course, this may not be good for generalisation.

Table 8 showing ANOVA for Originality  
Analysis of Variance Procedure  
Dependent Variable: ORIGINALITY

			Sum of	Mean	
Source	DF	Squares	Square	F Value	Pr > F
Model	11	7.72356576	0.70214234	3.67	0.0001
Error		945	180.58573413	0.19109601	
Corrected Total		956	188.30929990		
		R-Square	C.V.	Root MSE	ORIGIN Mean
		0.041015	25.00586	0.43715	1.74817
Source	DF	Anova SS	Mean Square	F Value	Pr > F
AGE	3	5.11020273	1.70340091	8.91	0.0001
SOCIOE	2	0.22933678	0.11466839	0.60	0.5490

2. There is no significant difference between the independent variables (age and socioeconomic status) and each of the clothing habits measures (social approval, anxiety, exhibitionism and originality).

(a) There is no significant difference between the independent variables (age and socioeconomic status) and social approval.

Table 9 Summary of Forward Selection Procedure for Dependent Variable  
SOCIAL APPROVAL

Variable		Number	Partial		Model		
Step	Entered In	R**2	R**2	C(p)	F		Prob>F
1	SOCIOE	2	0.0378	0.0794	42.7685	39.1731	0.0001

No other variable met the 0.5000 significance level for entry into the model.

(b) There is no significant difference between the independent variables (age and socioeconomic status) and anxiety.

Socioeconomic status (31.2547) emerged as the independent predictor of anxiety. The results suggest that: the poor are likely to be less anxious about what they put on while the rich may be anxious and worrisome, especially as pertaining to choice of what to wear. In other words, the unstable person may not be overly anxious about what he wears (Table 10).

Table 10 Summary of Forward Selection Procedure for Dependent Variable  
ANXIETY

Variable	Number	Partial	Model			
Step	Entered In	R**2	R**2	C(p)	F	Prob>F
1 SOCIOE	3	0.0288	0.1225	5.9624	31.2547	0.0001

No other variable met the 0.5000 significance level for entry into the model.

(c) There is no significant difference between the independent variables (age and socioeconomic status) and exhibitionism.

Table 11 Summary of Forward Selection Procedure for Dependent Variable  
EXHIBITIONISM

Variable	Number	Partial	Model				
Step	Entered In	R**2	R**2	C(p)	F		Prob>F
1	SOCIOE	1	0.0372	0.0372	21.0598	36.9277	0.0001
2	AGE	2	0.0011	0.0611	2.9272	1.0677	0.3017

No other variable met the 0.5000 significance level for entry into the model.

The results of the regression analyses indicate that socioeconomic-status (36.9277) is an independent predictor of exhibitionism. The results suggest that the richer a person is, the more he is likely to want to show off what he's wearing (Table 11).

(d) There is no significant difference between both independent variables (age and socioeconomic status) and originality.

Table 12 Summary of Forward Selection Procedure for Dependent Variable  
ORIGINALITY

ANOVA							
Variable Step	Number Entered In	Partial R**2	Model R**2	C(p)	F	Prob>F	
1 AGE	1 0.0218	0.0218	18.6497	21.3059		0.0001	

No other variable met the 0.5000 significance level for entry into the model.

Age (21.3059) emerged as independent predictor of originality in clothing habits. These results indicate that the older a person is, the more he is likely to be original and individualistic (Table 12).

## DISCUSSION

### AGE

Age emerged as a powerful predictor of originality in clothing, which being interpreted means that the older a person is, the more independent and individualistic in his dressing he is likely to be. This, of course, negates the expectation of the investigator, even though we would expect generational differences in clothing habits (Rubinstein 1995). Ordinarily, one would have expected the younger ones in their teenage years to be more adventurous, even in their dressing.

However, this finding may be explained in terms of the changing times. There is a lot of pressure on the older ones to look young, and in order not to be out of place in the social hierarchy, the individual seeks for alternative dress codes and styles. For instance, a 30year old student might wear sunglasses that will give her a teenage look, so as to look attractive. Also, there may be a tendency in the older students to be more apprehensive of their looks more than the younger ones. This is the reason why one sees older female students doing morning walk-outs and exercises in order to remain trim and look young.

The proposition that the 27 year olds+ females are more inclined to be anxious than the other groups may then be explained in terms of the above submission. Since they are already coming out of the younger years, there may be fears of losing their spouses or boyfriends to the younger and trimmer girls, hence, the pressure to dress well.

The tendency in the second age group (19-22 year olds) to seek for social approval more than the others may be explained in terms of the fact that they are the largest of the four groups (320) and constitutes the majority of most undergraduate faculties of Nigerian universities to date. Also the tendency in the first and the last age groups (15-18 year olds and 27year olds+) not to desire social approval of what they wear may be a result of the generational gap between them the other two groups.

Concerning exhibitionism in clothing habits, generally, the females were more inclined to showing off what they wear than the males. However, the second and the third age groups (23-26year olds and 19-22 year olds) were more inclined to be exhibitionist in their dressing. The groups are the largest of all the groups in the sample, and would probably constitute the majority on most campuses.

### SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

Socioeconomic status emerged as a strong predictor of clothing habits. It is particularly distinguished in the dimensions of social approval, anxiety and exhibitionism. On social approval, for instance, it is discovered that the tendency is the richer an individual is, the more he or she is likely to seek for approval of what he wears. This would only support the dictum that no man is an island. That the rich would seek and covet the approval of the poor, and that the middle class would seek to be like the rich is only to be expected.

On the other hand, the poor are seen to be more inclined to be anxious about what they wear, perhaps against the backdrop of the fact that they see the rich dressing well and the middle income group seeking to be like the rich. Desire for conformity, we believe is only human and that may be the basis for the anxiety of the poor.

Rubinstein (1995) submitted that from time immemorial, the rich has always sought to show-off their wealth for others to see and appreciate. Hence, the finding in this study that the rich are more inclined to exhibitionism than the other two groups is confirmed. The indigent students, then, have a tendency to be reserved/conservative in their dressing.

Even though the findings in this study did not show any significant difference of the three groups in originality, the poor and indigent students are found to be more original than the other two groups. Necessity is the mother of invention. Owing to the prevailing circumstances in the country, the poor being the worst hit with the harsh economy have to always find ways of making the most of a bad situation.



## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study contributes to a greater theoretical understanding of clothing habits and its place in the appraisal of the total person. It helps to appreciate the Nigerian university undergraduate, the many pressures and worries he bears, about what to wear, when to wear and how to wear it. It affords counsellors, parents and others in the helping profession to know their clientele\wards better, especially in the light of social, peer and individual pressures for conformity, and thus, able to offer therapeutic help, professionally or as laymen. On the basis of the findings, the following are some of the implications of this study:

Older undergraduates are likely to be less anxious about the clothes they wear and may be more independent, not so much desiring peer and social approval of what they put on. The implication of this is that the older an undergraduate is, the less anxious he is likely to be about what he wears, perhaps, also about life generally. This study also revealed that older students are likely to be more original and individualistic in their clothing habits. This may imply that owing to maturity, and demands of life in the larger society (since some of them are married), they are likely to take decisions which would put only close family members (and not the larger group, which includes friends) into consideration.

The study further revealed that there are indigent and middle-income individuals who would do anything to make sure they are in tune with the times in terms of fashion and clothes. Such persons may be willing to borrow, or even steal to make sure that they buy the kind of dress 'everybody' is wearing. This is in agreement with the position of Odeleye, Okunola and Odeleye (2010) that some individuals actually seek to cover-up for their psychosocial deficiencies, perhaps due to lack of self-confidence or negative self esteem. This may probably the same reason why some individuals take to alcohol and drugs. Rubinstein (1995) submitted that dressing in the attire of a class higher than one's own has been recognised as clothing symbol, and that clothing symbols are usually a reflection of cultural values that one has achieved and their use is largely a matter of personal choice. With an understanding that clothing symbols are not usually controllable by authority, the therapy then would be to let the person appreciate the need for openness and honesty, stressing that it is not worthwhile to be putting himself under so much stress just to stay in tune with vogue. The client may then be encouraged to seek for other ways of releasing tension, like getting more dedicated to his lectures and assignments. He should also be made to know that true friends would be friends whether one is rich or not.

Lack of familiarity with the prevailing dress codes and fashion may put the counsellor, parents and others involved with youths at a disadvantage in trying to help individuals with psychosocial problems. When fashion means different things to different individual, and to their intended audience, misunderstandings may result. Therefore, the counsellor must make extra effort to be updated in his knowledge of current trends in clothing, both locally and globally. For instance, Rubinstein (1995) remarked that, in the United States of America, the new clothing styles are indication of the uneasy times the nation is passing through. In Nigeria, the global economic recession may have made families to cut down on their budgets. This may in turn put a lot of stress on both young and old. Individuals have had to seek for cheaper ways of getting clothing and still look fashionable. Some girls would keep older men as dates to augment for the lack of funds.

More persons are patronising seamstresses and tailors, rather than buying designer clothes, and that has, of course, opened new doors of opportunities for entrepreneurs. The counsellor, then, must be abreast of the global climate and economy, and be able to appreciate individual clothing styles and be able to utilise such knowledge in helping his clientele. And like Rubinstein (1995) opined, the valid interpretation of clothing images, then, depends on awareness of the vocabulary of images and understanding of the psychosocial and cultural context within which the images appear. Knowledge of the accumulated basic signs and symbols is important not only as a means for consciously discerning the ongoing drama of social reality; it may also be useful in tracking human development so as to be able to help more individuals as we enter the new millennium.

Even though the sampling procedure ensured that the sample studied was representative of the population from which it was drawn, it would be expedient if further research could be done incorporating all the six geopolitical zones of the Nigerian federation. Apart from that, a cross-cultural

comparative study of Nigerian and American youths, especially as regards stereotypes, will be most desirable. This will open up a new field of interest and understanding of the peculiarities of the Nigerian adolescent in the new millennium. Cult and Gender dressing are other possible areas of research which will be beneficial to both the academia and the society at large.

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